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Statement submitted by Education International, International Federation of Journalists, International Trade Union Confederation, International Transport Workers' Federation, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Global Unions call for gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure

Global Unions, representing 85 million women workers across the public, private and informal sectors, call for the realisation of gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure for all women, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

This requires bold decisions to prioritise public policies and long-term public investments, including through tripartite consultations and negotiations, that will lift millions of women and girls out of poverty, towards a life of dignity and equality with income security and equal opportunities to access paid, decent and formal work - free from violence and harassment. Only concerted actions will reduce inequality and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform of Action.

Key challenges

More than half of the global population is not covered by any type of social protection scheme, and less than 30 per cent enjoy comprehensive social protection. Due to the gender gaps in social protection systems, women experience lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefit levels, especially with regard to old-age pensions, unemployment benefits and maternity protection. Gender gaps are especially acute in old age: nearly 65 per cent of people above the retirement age living without a regular pension are women. These trends put women at a greater risk of poverty than men, across the life cycle. Privatisation of public services leads to a shift from formal work into informality, thereby widening the gender gaps in social protection and limiting women's access to quality public services. Individualisation and privatisation of social protection further compound the disadvantage.

In many countries, social protection schemes have been designed on the basis of a male breadwinner model, assuming an uninterrupted and full-time career in the formal economy. This does not match the reality in today's world of work, where women are underrepresented in the labour market and overrepresented in informal employment. This excludes women from most contribution-based schemes, leaving them unprotected in the absence of social protection floors.

The disproportionate share of unpaid care work done by women also affects their social protection entitlements. Globally, women undertake 76 per cent of all unpaid care work and do 3.2 times more care tasks than men. Women interrupt their careers, work shorter hours and remain trapped in precarious work, preventing them from accumulating sufficient contributions to social protection schemes.

A lack of quality, gender-responsive, affordable and accessible public services including transport, water and sanitation, energy, childcare and long-term care for dependent relatives exacerbates unequal distributions of care work to the detriment of women's labour market participation and social protection entitlements. In a majority of countries, the low quality of jobs in the care sector prevents these services from expanding sufficiently to meet demand.

Women are paid less compared to men for doing work of equal value, reducing their social protection contributions and benefit levels and exposing women to continued inequality and a greater risk of poverty. Not all women experience these challenges in the same way. For women with multiple and intersecting identities the

challenges are compounded. Gender-responsive solutions must necessarily apply an intersectional lens in order to address the specific needs of the most marginalised.

The way forward

Financing and increasing public investments in the care economy. Public early childhood education and care, and care services for other dependents, including the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities are effective in closing the gender gaps in pay, social protection and employment. ILO Convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities and Recommendation 165 stipulate that affordable childcare, home-help and home-care services should be promoted.

Facilitating the redistribution of care work through a gender-balanced use of paid family leave. Non-transferable fully paid leave for each parent promotes a faster return to the labour market by women after having children, to reduce employer discrimination against women, and to support improved career prospects and higher pay for women.

Adopting and enforcing ILO Convention 100 on equal remuneration and Convention 183 on maternity protection combined with policies that increase pay transparency and reduce vertical and horizontal sectoral occupational segregation; implementing strong intersectional and anti-discrimination legislation, including those for workers with family responsibilities, and ensuring minimum living wages all contribute to closing the gender pay and pensions gap.

Adopting and implementing policies that facilitate transition from the informal to the formal economy in line with ILO Recommendation 204. These include creating sustainable decent jobs, providing incentives to transition from informal to formal work, enforcing labour laws and workplace regulations, and in line with ILO Recommendation 202 on social protection floors, enabling informal workers to benefit equally from social protection systems.

Providing universal gender responsive access to essential public health care and basic income security at every stage of life, in line with Recommendation 202. Labour market policies should be combined with reforms of the social protection system to mitigate the disadvantages faced by women by ensuring adequate, public non-contributory social protection schemes, such as basic pensions and minimum unemployment benefits. Over 85 per cent of the countries in which there is no gender gap in effective pension coverage have non-contributory pensions, which are usually universal or pension-tested.

Periods of care should be fairly credited; contributions to pensions and other contributory social security schemes should continue to be paid even, for example, during parental leave.

ILO Convention 102 on social security sets out the right to survivors' benefits for the spouse of a deceased worker. The benefit levels of survivors' pensions must be adequate, as a relatively large number of women depend on these benefits.

Governments must secure fiscal space for necessary investment in gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure by changing the rules and reversing the expansion of corporate power often through the use of tax incentives, public-private partnerships, tax evasion and trade agreements on public services. And by removing gender bias from macro-economic policymaking, including through recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work.

Governments must develop policies and measures that connect sustainable infrastructure, public services and social protection to maximise their effectiveness.

Expansion of public transport is vital to provide women with safe, equal access to public services including education, childcare and healthcare and to their place of work. Adequate public clean energy, sanitary and water facilities are imperative to quality care services and education and ameliorate key aspects of unpaid care work.

Social protection combined with quality public services provide income security and improve opportunities to access paid and decent work. If sustainable and effective solutions are to be found, women must be involved in policy decision-making and planning, and have access to adequate information on social and labour rights and protections. A significant gender gap exists in access to information and knowledge of rights and services. Public service and community broadcasting help reduce the gender gap and provide women with an important source of information, particularly on health and rights issues.

Recommendations

The Global Unions call on governments to take concerted action and prioritise, including through tripartite consultation and collective bargaining:

- Financing the development of, and public investment in gender responsive quality public services and sustainable infrastructure including through the creation and formalisation of jobs in the care sector, enhancing pay and conditions in the care sector, ensuring access to affordable and quality public transport, childcare and long term care, quality public education, from early childhood through further and higher education - and measures to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Financing, establishing and strengthening adequate, inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems, including social protection floors, basic pensions, survivors' benefits, paid parental leave, and paid leave for non-birthing parents that allows for an equal division of care responsibilities, and minimum unemployment benefits. Universal coverage must be ensured, including for women in precarious and informal work non-standard forms of employment. Periods of care must be credited fairly in social security contributions.
- Reforming and enforcing their laws in line with International Labour Organization Standards, including on: freedom of association (C87) and the right to organise and collective bargaining (C98), equal remuneration (C100), maternity protection (C183), discrimination (C111), social security (C102), workers with family responsibilities (C156), transitioning to the formal economy, (R204), social protection floors (R202) and by adopting an International Labour Organization Convention and Recommendation on violence and harassment in the world of work.